

NAS NORTH ISLAND - NAVY REGION SOUTHWEST NAVY ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

CONSERVATION

BURROWING OWL EDUCATION AND HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS

LEAD ACTIVITY

Naval Air Station (NAS) North Island

STATUS

Completed

MISSION

Educate the public; maintain a stable burrowing owl population

DESCRIPTION

Innovative education and habitat enhancement initiatives at NAS North Island have successfully increased and maintained a stable population of burrowing owls, protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty. Due to pest management practices and habitat loss on the southern California coast, the burrowing owl population in California has been drastically reduced over the last 20 years. Specifically at NAS North Island, the Natural Resources Office (NRO) determined that the predominant reasons for owl habitat loss were the crushing of burrows by lawnmowers and the destruction of burrows to control ground squirrels.

In order to combat burrow loss, the NRO developed a public education initiative that consisted of identifying burrowing owl nests with clearly visible signs, and placing additional information signs at strategic locations on NAS North Island. Following the 1991 breeding season during which nest complexes were marked with signs, the number of burrowing owl nests increased significantly from 17 in 1991 to 26 in 1992. The NRO initiated a proactive habitat enhancement program for burrowing owls currently inhabiting in a zone of NAS North Island that will become eelgrass mitigation areas. The program was designed to comply with applicable regulations so that the owls will be provided with a similar habitat to the one being destroyed, and that the endangered least tern, prey of the burrowing owl, would not be impacted by the move. These conservation initiatives proactively comply with regulations to protect the burrowing owl as well as the least tern, and minimize conflict between conservation goals and Navy operational needs. The total cost to the Navy to implement public education through sign posting was about \$4,000. The minimal costs associated with the education and relocation conservation initiatives resulted in benefits that cannot be quantified.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Fact Sheet:** [Burrowing Owl Conservation Initiatives \(NELPFS-4.PDF, 788KB\)](#)
- Winchell, Clark. "Natural History and Protection of Burrowing Owls." Proceedings from the Sixteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference March 1-3, 1994. University of California, Davis. 1994.

UPDATED: 01/23/02